

**A report on**

**Ysgol Y Deri**

**Sully Road  
Penarth  
CF64 2TP**

**Date of inspection: February 2025**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
and Training in Wales**

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Ysgol Y Deri

Name of provider	Ysgol y Deri
Local authority	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	English medium
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	Not appropriate
Number of pupils on roll	501
Pupils of statutory school age	408
Number in nursery classes	2
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 46.6%)	41.6%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.2%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.75%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/10/2016
Start date of inspection	17/02/2025

#### Further information

Ysgol y Deri is a special school maintained by the Vale of Glamorgan local authority. The school shares a site and facilities with a mainstream secondary school. Currently there are over 550 pupils on roll aged between 3 and 19 years. All pupils have individual development plans (IDPs) or statements of additional learning needs for the full range of additional learning needs (ALNs) including social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Nearly all pupils are drawn from the Vale of Glamorgan a few come from neighbouring authorities. Nearly all pupils have English as their home language. 44% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals.

The school employs 117 teaching staff and 325 support staff.

The school is currently spread over five sites and is heavily oversubscribed. A new provision to house the sixth form is currently under construction.

The school also has an engagement service (outreach) that supports over 500 pupils in mainstream schools.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: [mylocalschool.gov.wales](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Summary

The vision at Ysgol y Deri is securely rooted in the values of 'potential, opportunity and achievement'. The culture permeates every aspect of the school's life and work across the school's extensive and varying range of provisions.

Ysgol y Deri is a happy and nurturing community. Staff from across the teaching and therapeutic teams work together exceptionally well to provide high levels of care, support and guidance for pupils, which enables most pupils to make strong progress in all aspects of their learning during their time at the school. Pupils feel safe and valued and build strong and trusting relationships with staff.

All pupils at the school have additional learning needs and have either an individual development plan (IDP) or a statement of educational needs. The school has established a clear and well-defined approach to delivering its provision, effectively meeting the needs of each pupil. Leaders and staff have secured a wide range of high-quality specialist provisions and interventions that successfully support all pupils. Ysgol y Deri maintains a wide range of effective partnerships with health professionals and external agencies, which significantly enhance the support available to pupils.

Across all settings, staff foster positive relationships with pupils, creating a calm and supportive learning environment. Pupils enjoy learning and participate enthusiastically. The behaviour and engagement of pupils throughout the school are exemplary. Well-established routines, such as structured play, transitions, and sensory approaches, effectively support pupils' engagement and regulation.

Teaching staff have a clear focus on developing pupils' skills in important areas related well to their individual needs. For example, most pupils with complex needs develop increasing, life enhancing independence in their mobility in highly effective interventions that they then apply in the classroom and in their wider life.

Staff demonstrate strong skills in supporting pupils' communication as they move through the school. As a result, nearly all pupils develop their communication skills successfully, enabling them to access the curriculum, engage with each other, make choices and express themselves effectively. Further, pupils throughout the school develop independence skills that are appropriate to their developmental needs.

Pupils learn to effectively regulate their emotions and make noticeable progress in their readiness to learn over time. For example, with expertly tailored individualised support, those pupils with a history of exclusion and non-attendance, prior to attending the school, are reintegrated into a learning environment and then into formal learning with accredited outcomes that aid their next steps in learning.

Robust attendance procedures are in place across the school, which support improvement in attendance for many pupils. These include clear procedures for recording and tracking intervention and support and outcomes for targeted pupils. However, overall the attendance of a specific group of pupils with social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) remains too low.

The curriculum offer at Ysgol y Deri is broad, balanced and purposeful and provides a range of beneficial and stimulating experiences in real life contexts. This provision also leads to valuable accreditation where appropriate. Further, pupil voice sessions ensure that pupils influence the planning of their learning to incorporate what motivates, excites and is important to them.

The headteacher articulates successfully a clear vision for the school, across the extensive and varying range of provisions. Despite the significant challenges posed by the rapid and recent expansion of the school by the local authority, the headteacher provides calm, sensitive and purposeful leadership. He is very ably supported by both senior and middle leaders. Leaders are effective in their roles and responsibilities, making strategic decisions for improvement based on a purposeful range of quality assurance processes that are well-established. Self-evaluation processes are generally robust and are clearly linked to improvement priorities. Analysis and evaluation of outcome data are less well-developed.

## **Recommendations**

We have made two recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Continue to improve the attendance of specific groups of pupils at the school
- R2. Sharpen development planning, focusing clearly and consistently on the impact of whole-school priorities and initiatives on pupil outcomes

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

## Main evaluation

The school's vision is securely rooted in the values of 'potential, opportunity and achievement'. The culture permeates every aspect of the school's life and work across its extensive and varying range of provisions.

Ysgol y Deri is a happy and nurturing community. Teaching and therapeutic staff collaborate exceptionally well to provide high levels of care, support and guidance for pupils, which enables most pupils to make strong progress across all areas of learning at the school. Pupils feel safe and valued and build strong and trusting relationships with staff. Leaders place the well-being and outcomes of pupils at the heart of everything that they do. They set high expectations and aspirations for their pupils. Across the school, pupils are warm and nurturing toward their peers and staff, and many engage confidently and enthusiastically with visitors. There is a clear sense of community and mutual respect within lessons and wider school experiences. This is a strength of the school. Further, leaders and staff support and encourage families well and foster beneficial working relationships with parents and carers, for example through regular parent and carer workshops. This provides families with helpful information about how best to support their children.

There is a robust well-established safeguarding culture across the school. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. A notable strength of the safeguarding processes is the bespoke Multi Agency Information Sharing Meetings. Leaders review the online reporting system data every three weeks collaboratively with representatives from health, and social services. Meetings provide valuable opportunities for information sharing and provide a co-ordinated approach to meeting the individual needs of pupils and families well.

### **Supporting pupils' additional learning needs**

All pupils at the school have additional learning needs and have either an individual development plan (IDP) or statement of educational needs. The school has established a clear and well-defined approach to delivering its provision, effectively meeting the needs of each pupil. One-page profiles play a crucial role in ensuring that all staff members have a clear understanding of pupils' needs and interests.

### **Spotlight: High quality interventions**

Leaders and staff have secured a wide range of high-quality specialist provisions and interventions that successfully support all pupils. For example, the school's 'Launchpad' provision offers highly engaging approaches to encourage pupils to interact with and develop trust in adults as well as support their emotional regulation. Staff use role-play, gaming, radio, and animation projects effectively to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Parents and carers value this provision and comment that it has a life-changing impact on their child. Pupils are prioritised for this support based on need, and they continue in the programme until significant progress is made in their emotional regulation. Importantly, pupils can return to 'the Launchpad' should they need to re-engage with trusted adults at a later stage.

### **Spotlight: The provision of assistive technology**

The provision of assistive technology, including the gaming and virtual reality room, also has a profoundly positive impact on pupils with complex mobility needs. It offers authentic, meaningful choices in virtual environments. Whether driving a car or virtually riding a bike down a mountain, pupils are empowered to experience activities they would otherwise be unable to access, significantly enhancing their sense of independence and participation.

Ysgol y Deri maintains a wide range of strong partnerships with health professionals and external agencies, which significantly enhance the support available to pupils. Communication between the school and health services is highly efficient, with weekly meetings between health professionals, therapists, and school staff ensuring effective information-sharing and the prompt addressing of pupils' needs. This collaborative approach enables the swift identification and resolution of specialist support and equipment needs. Further, the school also offers various health clinics on-site, reducing disruption to pupils' learning and ensuring that families can access necessary health services in a familiar and supportive environment.

The school has established an effective approach to supporting pupils' behaviour. A well-established behaviour monitoring tool enables leaders to track and analyse trends across sites as well as for individual pupils. The highly effective pupil support team helps pupils to understand and manage their own behaviour successfully. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress in managing their behavioural needs during their time at the school.

The school provides education for pupils up to the age of 19. However, this provision is not available to all pupils as some pupils must leave at the end of Year 11. Consequently, there is inequity in post-16 education within the school.

## **Effective teaching and skill development**

Across all settings, staff foster positive relationships with pupils, creating a calm and supportive learning environment. Support staff are well-deployed and make highly valuable contributions to pupil progress by reinforcing learning and providing targeted support. As a result nearly all pupils enjoy learning, participate enthusiastically and listen with interest and follow instructions. Pupil behaviour and engagement across the school are exemplary. Well-established routines, such as structured play, transitions, and sensory approaches, effectively support pupils' engagement and regulation.

Nearly all teachers and support staff have clear expectations for pupils, ensuring that sessions are well-planned and responsive to individual learning needs. Staff adapt learning effectively, for example by providing differentiated tasks in food chain activities.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use questioning effectively to elicit responses and deepen understanding. Staff actively listen to pupils, helping them to gently challenge their perceptions and views. As a result, pupils develop an awareness of others' perspectives and learn to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions appropriately.

Teaching staff have a clear focus on developing pupils' skills in important areas related well to their individual needs. Most pupils with complex needs gain increasing independence in their mobility through highly effective interventions, which they then apply in the classroom and beyond.

Staff demonstrate strong skills in supporting pupils' communication as they move through the school. As a result, nearly all pupils develop their communication skills successfully, enabling them to access the curriculum, engage with each other, make choices and express themselves effectively. Over time, many pupils become increasingly competent in using their preferred approaches to communication to express their needs, feelings and choices or to answer teachers' questions. For example, they communicate well through gestures, sounds, communication boards, speech or using technology. Some older pupils engage in detailed conversation with enthusiasm and fluency.

Nearly all pupils using non-verbal communication, including signing and assistive technologies, make strong progress in developing these skills and transfer them to real world contexts. For example, they use electronic communication devices to fully contribute to school council meetings. Older more able pupils express their ideas clearly, for example debating gender equality in GCSE English or defending character choices in a role-playing game. Older pupils on the Penarth site prepare and deliver professional and engaging live radio shows, enhancing their confidence and presentation skills. They also



develop technical expertise, such as managing microphones and sound levels, and transitioning smoothly between speech and music.

Pupils across the school develop independence skills that are appropriate to their developmental needs. Younger pupils develop important social skills through structured play, learning to take turns, share, and regulate their emotions when losing points in a game. Older pupils for example, develop valuable vocational and independence skills, particularly through real-life experiences. For example, pupils in the school café and coffee van prepare food, serve customers, and operate electronic tills. In addition, pupils on the Derw Newydd campus work in the community garden project where they build decking for public use.

Pupils learn to effectively regulate their emotions and make noticeable progress in their readiness to learn over time. With expertly tailored, individualised support, pupils with a history of exclusion and non-attendance, before joining the school, successfully reintegrate into a learning environment. Over time, they engage in formal learning and achieve accredited outcomes that support their next steps.

Pupils benefit from relevant and exciting learning opportunities in developing their reading skills. For example, and where appropriate, pupils read correctly from symbol cards to collect items whilst on a scavenger hunt around the school. Pupils enjoy using their developing reading skills in real life contexts such as reading shopping lists and following instructions on self-checkout machines in local shops. Older more able pupils develop higher-order reading skills such as inference, deduction and analyse text as part of accredited courses.

Overall, pupils' writing skills develop in line with their abilities. Most pupils make strong progress in mark making and writing skills, making clear progress in their gross and fine motor control. Older and more able pupils have opportunities to write at length, exploring a range of styles, for example writing evaluatively about factors that contributed to Hitler's rise to power.

Where appropriate, pupils develop secure numeracy and digital skills through engaging, real-life applications. They use electronic tills in a school café and upcycling shop, reinforcing functional skills such as budgeting. Older, more able pupils extend their mathematical skills as part of their courses, for example by solving simultaneous equations and converting decimals to fractions.

Pupils engage well in creative and problem-solving tasks, applying their learning in practical contexts. They develop creativity through hands-on activities such as measuring and cutting wood in carpentry or constructing a skeleton using pasta. Pupils have successfully pitched a business idea to restore and sell furniture, leading to improvements

in both engagement and behaviour. Pupils also demonstrate strong engagement in the arts. Older pupils, for example, focus intently when creating detailed artwork, paying careful attention to shading, blending and adding perspective.

Pupils engage positively with the Welsh language in a range of contexts. They write about hair and eye colour in Welsh, use incidental Welsh where appropriate, and confidently repeat modelled phrases. Where appropriate, bilingual pupils benefit from the support of a Welsh-speaking teaching assistant, enabling them to communicate effectively. However, overall, the school's provision for Welsh first-language pupils is underdeveloped.

In the very few cases where teaching is less effective, the slow pace of lessons impacts on pupil engagement and challenge. Multi-sensory learning experiences are not always fully integrated and, in some instances, support staff are unclear about their role in managing dysregulation. As a result, some learning opportunities are missed for other pupils.

### **Curriculum delivery**

Ysgol y Deri provides an aspirational curriculum that is broad, balanced and purposeful. It offers engaging and meaningful experiences in real-life contexts, leading to valuable accreditation where appropriate. As a result most pupils thrive within the school and make strong progress. Further, pupil voice sessions ensure that pupils actively contribute to the planning of their learning, incorporating their interests, motivations and what is important to them.

#### **Spotlight: Vocational curriculum**

The school's curriculum prepares pupils well for the next steps in learning and future possible pathways. This is a notable strength. Vocational and work experience opportunities enhance pupils' independence and employability skills. Work experience placements are chosen carefully for pupils of all ages both within the school and in the wider community to reflect the skills and interests of pupils. For example, younger pupils explore different roles, such as serving as the school's postman, allowing them to develop confidence and responsibility.

### **Spotlight: Outdoor experiences**

Across all sites, many pupils benefit from highly valuable opportunities to experience outdoor activities such as cycling and mountain biking, hiking and exploring, paddle boarding and camping. Leaders ensure that all pupils have access to these activities by acquiring specialist bikes, wheelchair friendly tents and accessible paddle board equipment. These experiences foster important skills such as independence and resilience. Further pupils show increased self-esteem and well-being by experiencing new activities. These sessions have also contributed to an improvement in the attendance and communication of a few pupils.

Many pupils participate in thoughtfully designed trips and visits that enhance, consolidate and inspire pupils' learning and life experiences. For example, pupils enjoy visits to local farms, museums and art galleries as well as benefiting from residential visits both in Wales and abroad. These valuable opportunities allow pupils to develop a range of social and personal skills.

### **Pupil voice and responsibility**

Pupils have meaningful opportunities to shape and influence the life and work of the school. Younger Eco club members speak maturely and passionately about the importance of their role as Eco Heroes, highlighting their commitment to protecting animals and oceans and ensuring that the environment is well cared for.

Pupils readily take on leadership roles, developing authentic skills in responsibility and teamwork. For example, they eagerly serve visitors and staff in roles such as operating the coffee truck and café, where they prepare drinks, interact with customers, and manage payments. Older pupils speak enthusiastically about how these leadership experiences help prepare them for future careers and the world of work.

### **Pupils' attendance**

Robust attendance procedures are in place across the school, which support improvement in attendance for many pupils. These include clear procedures for recording and tracking intervention and support and outcomes for targeted pupils.

For pupils who have previously experienced significant disruptions to their education, attendance has improved considerably since joining the school. However, overall the attendance among a specific group of pupils with social emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) remains too low.

## **Leadership**

The headteacher clearly articulates a clear vision for the school, across its extensive and varied provisions. Despite the significant challenges posed by the school's rapid and recent expansion by the local authority, the headteacher provides calm, sensitive and purposeful leadership. He is very ably supported by both senior and middle leaders. Together they work effectively and cohesively to sustain a school where pupils are happy and make strong progress in their learning including their social, emotional and communication skills. Leadership, including shared leadership at all levels, is a notable strength of the school.

At Ysgol y Deri, leaders provide assured strategic direction under the headteacher's leadership. They secure this successfully through a clearly defined staffing structure and a range of beneficial processes such as well-planned and focused leadership meetings, high-quality professional development and robust performance management.

Leaders make strategic decisions for improvement based on an effective range of quality assurance processes, which are well-established. Staff are fully involved in evaluation processes and as a result feel highly valued by leaders. Self-evaluation processes are generally robust and directly linked to improvement priorities. However, analysis and evaluation of outcome data is less well-developed.

Leaders at all levels produce useful action plans with clear priorities and success criteria to improve the quality of the provision. However, development planning is overly complex, making it unclear how specific actions will benefit pupil outcomes.

The school has made strong progress in addressing the recommendations of the last inspection, for example in reviewing and revising its approach to planning for pupils individual learning needs.

### **Spotlight: Professional learning**

Leaders expertly nurture, support and develop staff at all levels. They place a significant priority on developing a highly skilled workforce and have created a strong culture of continuous professional learning for all staff. There are many significant examples of the school working collaboratively with schools in the local authority, across the sector and the wider world, which have led to mutual improvements at Ysgol Y Deri and its partner schools.

Through a well-planned and tailored programme of activities, leaders ensure that professional learning links appropriately to addressing school priorities for improvement and to individuals' needs. They adapt learning opportunities to suit the school's diverse provisions, including beneficial in-house weekly 'micro-training' sessions. Further, the range and high quality of leadership training and coaching and mentoring have strengthened the quality of leadership at all levels. Leaders evaluate the impact of professional learning on improved provision effectively.

Leaders use the professional development review processes successfully to support school improvement. Teachers have measurable objectives linked appropriately to the national professional standards and to whole-school priorities. Staff welcome opportunities to evaluate and review their own development through beneficial meetings with their line manager. As a result, the professional development review process makes a valuable contribution to improving many important aspects of the school, including the consistency of teaching and learning and the progressive development of pupils' skills.

The school addresses national priorities successfully, including improving the opportunities for pupils to learn through exciting and purposeful activities. Staff work diligently to remove barriers to learning and reduce the impact of poverty, for example ensuring that pupils have equal access to an extensive range of enrichment activities.

The school offers an impressive array of beneficial specialist environments and resources that support pupils' complex ALN needs successfully. These include a hydrotherapy pool, immersive experiences and a motorised walking device. However, due to the significant increase in pupil numbers at the school, access to these vital resources has become more limited. Further, subject specific and well-being areas have been reduced due to expansion on one of the sites.

Leaders have robust financial arrangements in place, ensuring that expenditure is clearly linked to priorities for improvement. The pupil development grant is used carefully to improve the range of opportunities and enrichment available to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Leaders measure its impact carefully as a routine part of their monitoring, to evaluate the success of their actions and inform further work.

Governors are proud to be associated with the school. They are supportive of and knowledgeable about the school's work. Many governors visit the school regularly and participate in a suitable range of quality assurance activities, for example learning walks, listening to learners and data evaluation. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The governing body provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge, and holds senior leaders to account in its role as a 'critical friend'.

### **Additional information**

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. ‘*most pupils...*’ or ‘*very few pupils...*’. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%



## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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